

Testimony of
Michael Carona
Sheriff
Orange County, California

State of California
Little Hoover Commission

Public Hearing on Governor Schwarzenegger's Reorganization Plan #2
Reforming the Youth and Correctional Agency

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Commissioners, Distinguished Witnesses and Members of the Public:

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Mike Carona, and I am the Sheriff in Orange County, California. It is an honor and a pleasure to be here with these distinguished individuals from around the state to share my experience and my perspective to ensure that the reorganization process is successful.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger graciously appointed me to serve as a Commissioner on the California Performance Review Commission. My work with the California Performance Review has been invaluable in allowing me to see first hand the enormity of state government and the complexities of running a nation state. Through this process, I have heard from countless citizens who have shared their insights and their concerns to ensure thoughtful change and restructuring of our government.

While recommendations were put forward by state employees, all of us appointed to the commission brought our own concerns and differing perspectives as to what was wrong with state government and what should be done to alleviate those concerns. Frankly, it was a stroke of genius by Governor Schwarzenegger to solicit public feedback across the state for two reasons:

1. State reforms and reorganizations that have taken place prior to the CPR have not always been properly vetted and, therefore, have not always entertained the public support that is often necessary to make true and lasting change.
2. Public testimony has assisted all of us in viewing each topic in a new light thus shedding the biases we brought to the table.

While the commission did not make specific recommendations on each topic, we were able to offer the Governor our consensus that, I believe appropriately reflected the vast majority of the commissioners while embracing the feelings of the citizens who wrote in and testified before the commission.

The review of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's Reorganization Plan by the Little Hoover Commission allows yet one more opportunity to discuss and debate the merits of the recommendations and I am happy to have the opportunity to testify from my perspective and my experience as a member of local law enforcement in Southern California.

As a whole, the plan to reform the Youth and Adult Correctional Agency should be applauded on many levels as a plan to ensure that the California Correctional System is once again a model of accountability and efficiency.

As the reorganization takes place, it is important to ensure that focus is kept on the local communities. It is vitally important that the local communities have a part in the planning process and a voice in the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Local jails should retain the same level of interaction, state oversight and influence in training policies they have currently. And, we must ensure that local governments are not required

in any way to increase their financial burdens while the state decreases theirs – either by unfunded mandates or through state subsidies that go unpaid.

Additionally, changes in the terms for parolees, early release for older inmates, and transition programs should factor in any and all potential impacts that local communities may endure (such as recidivism). While such changes may be financially beneficial, it is necessary to identify which types of prisoners would be successful under such changes. For instance, while some older prisoners could be safely released early from prison, even older sexual predators are dangerous and would put the public at risk upon early release.

Moreover, providing early release or moving inmates from state to local jails will require careful planning to ensure that we are not making our streets more dangerous and increasing our liability. In counties across the state such as Los Angeles and San Bernardino, overcrowding has already necessitated the early release of many inmates; therefore, any move to add more offenders to these jails would only exacerbate the situation.

The state should also keep in mind that there are many resources available at the local level that can be utilized when restructuring programs and integrating inmates back into society. Public engagement is crucial as these one-time offenders reenter their communities. Not only will this keep us all safe, but we all benefit when an offender leaves a life of crime and becomes a productive citizen.

Most importantly, however, is that the state must ensure that the Secretary of the new Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has direct accountability over every piece and every unit of the organization. This is the only clear way to ensure direct command and responsibility and to eliminate many of the challenges that currently exist.

The goals of the California Performance Review are important and necessary and I believe we are taking the right steps. However, this process will only be valuable if some change takes place that is based on the support of the public. I applaud the work of Governor Schwarzenegger, state employees, my fellow commissioners, and the citizens who took their time to share their views with us. Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that the residents of California are safe and secure and that our tax dollars are working effectively and efficiently.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.